



A Strategic Look at the Future of APHIS' Veterinary Services

The national animal health landscape has changed significantly in recent years and more change is coming. The mission and role of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service's (APHIS) Veterinary Services (VS) must also evolve to meet the animal health challenges of the 21st century.

Forces Driving Change

Some of the key forces affecting U.S. animal health and VS include:

Evolving needs of animal agriculture industry. With effective control or eradication of once-significant diseases, the scope and type of government services needed by the animal agriculture industry is evolving. Several major disease control and eradication programs are either complete or nearing completion. Additionally, changes in industry structure, such as an increase in the number of large-scale, production-intensive farm operations, have altered the type of government services needed.

Advances in technology.

Advancements in diagnostics, vaccines, and novel treatment technologies have the potential to change how veterinary medicine is practiced and how animal disease events are managed. Due to emerging treatment possibilities, the need for traditional eradication programs that rely on large-scale depopulation activities may be reduced.

Emerging diseases, including zoonotics. Diseases continue to emerge in the United States. These include newly discovered diseases, variations of known diseases, known diseases occurring for the first time in the United States, or known diseases re-occurring in this country. Many of these emerging diseases are zoonotic. Public awareness of diseases like highly pathogenic avian influenza, bovine spongiform encephalopathy, West Nile virus, and severe acute respiratory syndrome has escalated consumer/public demand for leadership at the intersection of animal and public health concerns.

Threats beyond the animal health arena. Emerging diseases are not the only threats affecting the animal health landscape. Threats can come from a variety of other sources, including international agricultural emergencies, natural or man-made disasters, and agro-terrorism. Food safety issues continue to draw public attention and have implications for animal and public health. And the increased emphasis on homeland security following the 9-11 terrorist attacks has redefined the role of organizations deemed "first responders," including APHIS.

Global agriculture and trade. The growing volume and complexity of U.S. involvement in global agricultural business and trade is transforming our role and creating new challenges.

Bilateral, zero-risk, country-to-country trade negotiations are being replaced with multilateral, regional, and risk-mitigation-based standards. The number of countries from which the United States imports animals and animal products is expanding rapidly. And the continued growth and importance of export markets for U.S. animal agriculture industries is dependent on meeting increasing requirements for health and quality assurance.

24/7 connectivity. Customers in all businesses want "anywhere, anytime" connectivity that they can use to carry out their business. Emphasis on speed and multi-tasking, the digital revolution, and the "always-on world" are changing the way animal health activities and agricultural business are conducted.

Flat or decreasing federal budgets. Federal budget deficits are forecast to continue through 2015. The continuing presence of these deficits will limit the availability of new funding. Emphasis must be placed on prioritizing activities and refocusing efforts to ensure that the application of resources is consistent with national animal health priorities.

VS 2015: The Vision for Veterinary Services

The expertise and core capabilities of VS position the organization not only to meet animal health challenges arising from the forces described above but also to become the national veterinary authority of the United States. To reach this goal, VS management has identified three key changes as essential for the VS organization in 2015.

- Greater emphasis on disease prevention, preparedness, detection, and early response activities
- An expanded veterinary health mission that is responsive not only to issues that impact animal agriculture, but also public health concerns connected to animal populations of any kind
- An expanded portfolio of interstate and international certification services that meet the increasing expectations of global customers

Increased focus on disease prevention, preparedness, detection, and early response.

VS' goal is to lessen the frequency of animal health events by emphasizing prevention and preparedness. VS will design and direct comprehensive national animal health surveillance systems capable of finding foreign, emerging, and program diseases, and of supporting international reporting and trade verification requirements. VS will investigate potential emerging animal health threats and apply decision criteria to determine appropriate early responses.

Though focused on prevention and preparedness, VS will respond effectively when needed. VS will work with its partners to develop a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities, especially in new response arenas such as bioterrorism events and natural disasters. VS will continually evaluate the robustness of response plans for diseases and other events of concern and the availability of vaccines, diagnostics, stockpiles of materials, laboratory capacity, and disease simulation models. VS will maintain readiness through ongoing preparation, training, and practice.

When needed, VS will extend its prevention and early response efforts to address animal health issues occurring outside of the United States. VS will work with other APHIS units to identify, prioritize, plan, and direct APHIS-funded animal health surveillance and disease control or eradication programs carried out overseas. VS will assist other countries as they develop their animal health capacities and will provide leadership in the development of global animal health standards and methods.

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An expanded veterinary health mission. While enhancing U.S. animal agriculture by improving animal health will remain a cornerstone of VS' work in 2015, VS will also engage in health issues impacting public health when those issues are connected to animal populations of any kind.

VS will be proactive in assisting with issues that affect food safety and public health by providing national leadership on the animal health component associated with these issues. VS will collaborate with others to identify science-based interventions along the animal production chain to protect public health. VS will work with wildlife entities to address health issues that impact production agriculture and wildlife health. VS will lend its veterinary assets (laboratory networks, stockpiles, and response corps) and provide leadership in areas within VS' expertise (epidemiology, surveillance planning, risk analysis, and modeling) when public health issues arise involving exotic and wildlife species.

Expanded interstate and international certification services.

Certifying animals, animal products, and veterinary biologics for interstate and international movement will continue to be VS' most intensive interface with the public.

VS will upgrade its processes to meet the speed of today's business environment demands. VS will also increasingly align its trade protocols with international standardization efforts. VS will be a leader in standard-setting efforts. To address the increasing complexity of trade work, especially export certification, VS will create a cadre of trade specialists.

VS will expand its services to include certifying that animals and animal products meet standards in new areas including animal welfare, environmental sustainability, and quality assurance attributes. Such standards may be established by industries and by other organizations or agencies.

VS will partner with other agencies to provide integrated government certification approaches to meet the demand for 'farm-to-fork' verification of animal-derived products and foods. The USDA stamp of approval on marketed animals, animal products, and veterinary biologics engenders confidence in U.S. trading partners.

Conclusion

In developing a new vision for VS, the VS management team has been guided by the goal of promoting the continuing health of the Nation's animal agriculture and of maximizing VS effectiveness in meeting emerging animal health challenges.

The VS of 2015 will ensure:

- The integrity of U.S. animal health infrastructure by emphasizing preparedness through increased services in the areas of disease monitoring, prevention practices, detection methods, and response exercises;
- Food availability by addressing animal health concerns affecting farm-raised animals that arise in any animal species;
- Food security by resolving farm-raised animal production events;
- Public health by incorporating measures into VS operations to address zoonotic concerns that arise in any animal species; and
- Process integrity by providing systems which validate all the above to domestic and international stakeholders.